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ABSTRACT

Based on preliminary interviews with 40 adults, an instrument was devised for assessing voters' uses and gratifications of viewing television news about presidential campaigns. When this instrument was used to survey 226 persons of voting age, an analysis by orthogonal rotation of the data produced a six-factor solution accounting for 52.6% of the variance. The six factors were labeled (1) avoidance (the most potent of the six factors), (2) conversation, (3) para-social interaction, (4) surveillance (general information seeking), (5) entertainment, and (6) selectivity. The results, largely consistent with earlier research on the subject, add some potentially important insights via the use of more extensive, open-ended preliminary interviews and the consequent development of a larger inventory of relevant items for testing. In using a lengthier and more sophisticated categorical scheme to measure gratifications relevant to political news, it became possible to make some potentially useful distinctions about what kind of surveillance gratifications are most relevant to different types of people attempting to make vote decisions. The findings, such as those pointing to comedy entertainment as a viable orientation for political cynics, also suggested that some latent, socially awkward, and systematically dysfunctional gratifications not only can be articulated by respondents, but more importantly can be empirically understood. (RL)

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# POLITICAL NEWS ON TELEVISION: A CLOSER LOOK AT AUDIENCE USE AND AVOIDANCE ORIENTATIONS

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# POLITICAL NEWS ON TELEVISION: A CLOSER LOOK AT AUDIENCE USE AND AVOIDANCE ORIENTATIONS

Over the past few years we have seen the uses and gratifications approach to the study of media gain steadily in popularity to become one of the dominant theoretical frameworks for inquiry into audience orientations and consequent behavior. Political communication research has been one of many areas where the approach has heavily influenced many of the inquiries. As in other related content or program bound areas of study, political communication researchers who have incorporated uses and gratifications measures in their studies have, after a brief exploratory period which looked into what the relevant gratifications might be, begun to heed the Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch[1] suggestion to incorporate the gratification measures as intervening variables which could distinguish among media effects. The logic for using gratifications as intervening variables, as Kraus and Davis suggest, appears quite sound.

> Media uses or gratifications can be causally linked to specific predispositions toward political action. These predispositions can be used to explain specific actions. In this approach, media use is not directly linked to political action as in the hypodermic model. Instead, it contributes to a process in which various types of political predispositions are formed, which

> ultimately influence political action. The process can be influenced by other social or psychological variables. Research must specify the particular conditions which encourage or attenuate such a process.[2]

Undoubtedly, part of specifying those "particular conditions" requires that researchers come to a thorough understanding and reach some consensus of the gratifications relevant to the political communication consumption process. While it can be seen that a consensus of sorts has been reached about what gratifications are indeed relevant to political communication, this consensus has largely come about from an undue reliance on the early research by Blumler and McQuail[3] rather than through any ongoing attempt to come to a more thorough understanding of those gratifications and the politically motivated antecedant conditions which may be linked to the needs which make them relevant.

Clearly, our attempts to understand the role of gratifications in media effects may be subverted by a failure to more diligently explore the range of gratifications relevant to political communications. Moreover, as Katz has suggested, the research in this area has almost exclusively focused on the manifest or normative gratifications relevant to politics and has done little exploration into the more latent functions which "trigger interpersonal and intrapersonal mechanisms which make for active participation rather than just rational calculation or detached observation"[4] of the political process. Finally, the premature consensus has to some degree stifled our explorations into whether media relevant political gratifications differ significantly from one country to another, from one political system

to another, and from one media system to another. While it would seem that these differences could very likely seriously intervene in our understanding of the gratification satisfaction process in a particular society, we have yet to explore whether these are indeed differences which make a difference. From this perspective, it seems clear that our exploratory work is not yet done.

The first major uses and gratifications study of political mass communications by Blumler and McQuail[5] provided just such an exploration. Through extensive interviewing, they developed a category system for describing various uses and avoidances of all types of television programming which featured political candidates during the 1964 British national election. They used eight statements with which to define each of five categories of gratifications involved in watching political programming. The five gratification categories were: 1)Surveillance (based on Lasswell[6] and Wright's[7] notions), 2)Vote Guidance, 3)Anticipated Communication, 4)Excitement, and 5)Reinforcement (of a pre-existing political view).[8]

In addition, Blumler and McQuail developed three categories of reasons for avoiding programs which featured political candidates: 1)Partisanship (because the viewer had already made a voting decision), 2)Political Alienation, and 3) Relaxation (that is, the viewer didn't watch political programming because it wasn't relaxing to do so).[9] While it should be remembered that the Blumler and McQuail study, the first of its kind, was exploratory, the inadequacy of their scheme of uses and avoidances seems obvious in light of their findings. They

found, for instance, that over 50 percent of the viewers who watched political programming did so only for "surveillance" reasons.[10] This is not surprising when one looks closely at how this "surveillance" function was defined. The two most highly endorsed "surveillance" statements in the study were: 1)"To see what some party will do if it gets into power," and 2)"To keep up with the main issues of the day."[11]

The problem with these kinds of statements is that they only begin to scratch the surface of the television viewer's underlying needs of political programming on television. The statements fail to get at why the individual feels the need "to see what some party will do if it gets into power" or why the individual feels the need "to keep up with the main issues of the day." This problem is not unique to the Blumler and McQuail study. It has plagued much of the uses and gratifications research which has attempted to measure Lasswell's surveillance function.

The more recent studies have not remedied this problem. In fact the problem may have been further complicated. In a panel study, McLeod and Becker[12] attempted to test the validity of the Blumler and McQuail gratification and avoidance measures for explaining political television use in the American 1972 presidential election campaign. The study found support for the general hypothesis that the gratification and avoidance items explained variance in political effects measures (e.g., issue accuracy, probability of voting, interest in the campaign, political discussion, etc.) over and above that explained by the

media exposure variables.[13] McLeod and Becker did little to remedy the problem inherent in applying Blumler and McQuail's use and avoidance statements (developed for both the British system of elections and television broadcasting) to the American system of elections and television broadcasting. In addition, they failed to note the basic weakness in the way in which the surveillance function may have been defined.

Chaffee and Izcaray, building on the research methodology developed by McLeod and Becker, tested the validity of the Blumler and McQuail gratification and avoidance measures in a study of government and political news use in Venezuela.[14] They used two sets of identical gratification and avoidance items; one set for television news and one for newspapers. The two sets were factor analyzed together, yielding two general avoidance factors, two surveillance factors (one for TV news, one for newspapers), a vote guidance factor (linked with interpersonal political discussion), a selective avoidance factor (avoiding because opinions about politics had already been formed), and a selective exposure factor (suggesting reinforcement viewing and reading). They found little support for McLeod and Becker's hypothesis that media gratification and avoidance items explained additional variance in political effects measures beyond that explained by media exposure variables.[15]

Swanson moved away from reliance on the Blumler and McQuail gratification and avoidance measures and concentrated instead on two specific political media uses: decisional utility and interpersonal utility. His main hypothesis of

interest was that persons who score high on measures of either decisional or interpersonal utility will be exposed to more political communication that people who score low on such measures. Swanson found a significant positive relationship between decisional utility and political media exposure, but not between interpersonal utility and exposure.[16]

More recently, Becker has looked closely at whether the Blumler and McQuail gratification items measured accurately the breadth of media relevant political gratifications. In one report evaluating four data sets, Becker's goal was to "provide information as to whether the battery of items in use is complete and what structure exists amongst the items."[17] In exploring the possibilities, Becker, in gathering one of the four data sets, conducted some prelimary interviews which contained two open-ended questions about the reasons people did or did not pay attention to political news broadcasts. While he found that "the list needs to be expanded to include avoidances because of perceived political bias in the media," the main conclusion he draws is that "the items developed by Blumler and McQuail seem to cover adequately the range of relevant motivations."[18] Becker suggests that "it also is clear that respondents will not necessarily volunteer the same gratifications and avoidances to open-ended questions as are tapped through the closed-ended gratifications and avoidance lists."[19] It may be that with only two open-ended questions thrown in amongst closed-ended questions, Becker may have limited his ability to ascertain more sensitively the range of non-normative functions related to political media use.

Even with Becker's attempts, researchers have not yet begun to creatively understand the reasons people give for viewing or avoiding political information on television, nor have they begun to adequately explain why certain kinds of functions exist. One seemingly unnoticed problem is that most studies have been tied to a limited perspective of what the range of possible uses may be and, in the main, have failed to adequately probe beyond a superficial operational definition of the surveillance function as outlined by Lasswell many years ago. The present study attempts to re-assess the possibilities in the uses and gratifications associated with viewing political information on television.

In addition, this study begins to explore why the different orientations towards political media exist. In order to do this, the use of the mass media by individuals is conceptualized as a low level form of political participation. Variables which have been suggested by Milbrath,[20] Verba and Nie[21] and others to be the best predictors of high levels of political participation are used to explain political media orientations. Following the Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch[22] model of media uses and gratifications, both the relevant social and psychological predictors of political participation are used to facilitate such an explanation.

METHODOLOGY

In order to better focus the study, both for the researcher and for the respondents, a decision was made at the start of the inquiry to limit its scope to the use and avoidance of one particular type of political programming on television. As

network evening news programming seemed to be the most easily identifiable source of information about the presidential campaign on television, it was chosen as the area for study. The decision to limit the study in this manner was based on the assumption that if all forms of political information presented on television (paid advertisements, paid political programming, interview programs, local news programs, the presidential debates, etc.) were included, the results would be minimally useful because of the built-in source of confusion over which of the types of political programming was the source of what type of gratification. By more closely focusing the area for study, it was assumed we could better understand the relationship among media functions.

Graduate students enrolled in a political mass communications seminar at the University of Iowa conducted hour-long focused interviews with forty people in the Iowa City, Iowa area in order to find out why people watched or why they avoided watching presidential campaign coverage on network news programs. Interviewers were instructed to probe beyond the type of stereotyped response which is classically categorized as "surveillance" (i.e., "to find out what is going on in the world"). When analyzed, these interviews yielded approximately 400 first-person statements about how these people used the information they got about the presidential campaign from network evening news programs. These 400 statements were independently sorted into categories by three researchers.[23]

Seventeen hypothesized use and avoidance categories emerged from the sorting procedure:

1. Para-social Interaction (with the candidates and families)
2. Time Filler (or habitual and/or ritual use)
3. Conversation-Play (used only for the purposes of social facilitation)
4. Conversation-Persuasion (trying to influence another person's vote)
5. General Vote Guidance (a non-specific or general use for vote guidance)
6. Issue Vote Guidance (a specific use with emphasis on candidates'stands on issues)
7. Personality Vote Guidance (a specific use with emphasis on the candidates' personalities)
8. Dramatic Entertainment (concentrating on the excitement of the election race)
9. Comedy Entertainment (finding politics or the candidates amusing)
10. Reinforcement-Partisanship (or existing political opinion or belief)
11. Reinforcement-Political Alienation (of negative political views)
12. Reinforcement-Positive Network News Views
13. Reinforcement-Negative Network News Views
14. Avoidance-Partisanship (because vote decision made)
15. Avoidance-Political Alienation (because of dislike for politics)
16. Avoidance-Negative Network News Views
17. Avoidance-Relaxation (because the individual prefers relaxation)

No surveillance function, as such, emerged from the sorting procedure. The more specific categorical procedure allowed for successful definitions of gratifications which went beyond the type of stereotyped response which was normally labeled by uses and gratifications researchers as "surveillance."

An instrument was devised which contained three statements for each of the 17 hypothesized use or avoidance categories; resulting in a total 51 statements. The three statements which defined each category are shown in Table 1. Each item was scored on a seven point Likert-type scale with pole labels of

"strongly agree" and "strongly disagree."

In addition to the use and avoidance statements, the questionnaire contained a number of independent measures which have been shown to be useful in explaining political participation. These variables can be broken down into a number of groups.[24]

Political Interest Variables: Milbrath found that people who were more interested in politics, more loyal to a certain party, candidate or political philosophy were more likely to participate in politics.[25] Five political interest measures were used here: 1)Degree of Interest--a measure of interest in the presidential election campaign, 2)Concern for Outcome--measuring how much the person cared about who won the presidential election, 3)Strength of Partisanship--measuring the degree to which a person classified himself as a Democrat or Republican (or other party member), 4)Strength of Leaning--measuring the degree to which a person classified himself as being for either Carter or Ford, and 5)Liberal/Conservative Strength--measuring the degree to which a person classified himself away from middle of the road and towards either Liberal or Conservative.

Communication Exposure Variables: Milbrath has cited study after study in substantiating the generalization that "the more stimuli about politics the greater the depth of the participation."[26] Communication variables used in this study were the amounts of: 1)Television Viewing, 2)Television News Viewing, 3)Radio News Listening, 4)Newspaper Reading, 5)Newsmagazine Reading, and 6)Interpersonal Discussion--measuring

the frequency with which a person talked about politics with his friends of family.

Demographic Variables: Milbrath has generalized that persons with more education, higher occupational status, and greater income are more likely to participate in politics, as are middle aged persons more than younger or older persons.[27] Measures used in the present study included: 1)Education, 2)Occupation, 3)Socio-Economic Neighborhood, and 4)Age.[28]

Psychological Involvement Variables: Two measures of psychological involvement in politics frequently used in predictin political participation were used in this study: 1)Political Efficacy--as measured by the Campbell Political Efficacy Scale[29] determines the degree to which a person believes he has the power and control necessary to be effective in his relationship with the political environment, and 2)Political Cynicism--as measured by the Agger, Goldstein and Pearl Political Cynicism Scale[30] taps the degree of political distrust and alienation. High political efficacy and low political cynicism have been shown to predict high political participation.[31]

Political Activity Variable: Finally, a scale adapted from Milbrath provided a straightforward measure of a person's actual involvement in politics; it is simply the sum of the number of a person's political activities.[32]

Sampling: A stratified random block sampling procedure was used in obtaining 226 interviews with persons of voting age in the Cedar Rapids, Iowa area.[33] Graduate mass communications students collected the door-to-door interviews on September 11,

1976, a date which was nearly two weeks before the first debate between then-presidential candidates Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter.

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The 51 use and avoidance statements were factor analyzed using a principal components solution with varimax (orthogonal) rotation. A six factor solution accounted for 52.6% of the variance in the correlation matrix while meeting the minimum factoring criterion of an eigenvalue greater that 1.0 and where each factor obtained had at least three items with a loading greater than .50. The varimax rotated factor matrix appears in Table 1. Weighted factor scores were computed for each subject in the sample on each of the six factors.[34] Each of the six factor scores was used as the dependent variable in a series of stepwise multiple regression analyses in order to determine which combination of the independent social and psychological predictors of political participation provide the best explanation of each factor.[35] A summary of the regression equations for each factor appears in Table 2.

Factor I--Avoidance: This factor, clearly tapping the most potent dimension of political news use in the sample population, clusters together statements from a variety of hypothesized avoidance categories. Although there are some political reasons for avoidance (e.g., "nothing would change my mind on how I'm going to vote" and "my mind is already made up"), the main reason for avoidance appears to be a felt need for relaxation. The most important statements defining the factor indicate a preference for "watching television programs that will entertain me,"

and a feeling that "I am not much interested in politics." and "I've seen too much of it (politics) already." When the coverage of the presidential campaign on network news is watched rather than avoided it is seen to be "nothing special to me, it's like anything else, it just fills time." Not surprisingly, the regression analysis on this factor score shows that lack of interest in the presidential campaign is clearly the best predictor of this type of avoidance. In addition, a low degree of political activity, lack of concern over the outcome of the election, and a high degree of political cynicism characterize people who are high avoiders of political news on television.

Factor II--Conversation: This straightforward factor appears to be based in a need for social interaction and exemplified the use of political information as a means to facilitate that need. . Items loading highly on this factor indicate the use of presidential campaign coverage on network news "as a starting point in conversation with others," as a way "to help me talk about my opinions about the candidates and issues," as help in "supporting my viewpoints when I talk to other people," and as "a good thing to talk about" with other people. While the factor structure does little to distinguish the hypothesized categories of conversation for play purposes and conversation for persuasion purposes, it is most closely linked with interpersonal discussion of politics with friends and family in the regression analysis. In addition, people with high factor scores on this conversation factor are strongly interested in the presidential campaign, tend to be younger, read few

newsmagazines, and identify strongly with a political party.

Factor III--Para-Social Interaction: This factor is clearly descriptive of a dimension far more complex than the first two factors. The two items loading most highly on the factor indicate that some people feel strongly that campaign coverage on the network evening news "is the most important thing I have in making up my mind about how I will vote" and further, "is hard to ignore when I go to vote because they (network news programs) give me so much more information than anywhere else." While these two items indicate a great dependence on network news programs as a source of information for vote guidance purposes, and as such may describe a socially desirable manifest function operant with this orientation, they may fail to accurately gauge the underlying need linked to the potentially more important latent function described within the factor structure. The two items next highest in loading on the factor may be more important in assessing the underlying need. They state that by watching campaign coverage on network news "I can feel like the presidential candidates are talking directly to me" and "I like to think I'm really taking part in the campaign." These items suggest that this type of media use is seated in the need for involvement, or what Horton and Wohl have described as "para-social interaction" for people who "consider that they are involved in face-to-face exchange rather than in passive observation."[36] High para-social interactors are particularly distinguishable by their tendency to be low in political cynicism and extremely interested in the presidential campaign. These

people also tend to live in the lower socio-economic neighborhoods and have little education and correspondingly read newsmagazines and listen to radio newscasts infrequently while viewing television comparatively often.

Factor IV--Surveillance: All of the items which were used in the hypothesized use category of Reinforcement of Positive Network News Views loaded most highly on this factor, showing a general trust of network news as a source of information about the campaign. In addition, the factor defines the desire for "an easy way. . . to keep up with the presidential campaign without much effort" by giving "an opportunity to get a quick look at how the candidates for President stand on certain issues." The type of media use described by this factor is a conglomeration of a number of information-seeking and reinforcement related hypothesized categories. Thus, the result is very similar to Lasswell's classic surveillance function and is rooted in the need for good, quick reliable information that can be trusted. Similar to Factor III, this factor can be seen as vote guidance; however, as two of the three hypothesized Issue Vote Guidance statements load highest on the factor, it clearly has more of an information-seeking rather than personal involvement dimension to it. The regression analysis shows that a high degree of political efficacy is most strongly linked to a high surveillance factor score. In addition, advancing age and a comparatively high level of education combined with little commitment to either Liberal or Conservative ideology and little political cynicism are related to using television news for

Issue Vote Guidance.

Factor V--Entertainment: All three of the items defining the hypothesized Comedy Entertainment use category had their highest loadings on Factor V. Persons with high factor scores on this factor found the presidential candidates "very amusing to watch," "got a good laugh watching" them, and likened watching the campaign coverage to "watching comedy programs on television." Underlying the factor seems to be a clear need for entertainment, play and enjoyment. Not surprisingly, the regression analysis shows that political cynicism, by far, predicts a high entertainment factor score. These cynics also tend to be highly partisan. Considering the high degree of political cynicism linked to this factor, highly partisan people using political news for entertainment purposes may have been trying to make the best out of what seems a frustrating (and unentertaining) situation; the political drama they watch on network news is transformed into a comedy of errors.

Factor VI--Selectivity: The two statements loading highest on Factor VI describe a lack of attention to campaign coverage because "I already know who I will vote for" and because "everything I see backs up. . . who I am going to vote for as President." The factor seems to be based in a need to be consistent through avoiding or distorting conflicting information. The regression analysis shows a high factor score on the selectivity factor can be explained by a strong degree of partisanship, political activity and leaning to a particular candidate as well as a tendency to be low in television news viewing, radio news listening, and newspaper reading.

## CONCLUSIONS

At the outset of this study, it was noted that there is need to come to a more thorough understanding of the use and avoidance orientations which are relevant to political communications. Among other things, the previous research shows an undue reliance on and questionable application of the Blumler and McQuail instrument which was geared to the British media and political systems.

While the results from this study, like those from Becker's[37] initial re-assessment, are largely consistent with the Blumler and McQuail findings, some potentially important insights have been gained through the use of more extensive open-ended preliminary interviews and the consequent development of a larger inventory of relevant items for testing. For instance, at first glance, the emergence of a large avoidance factor seems to be, at best, confounding. In contrast to Becker's suggestions that "respondents seem to be able to recognize an applicable gratification when asked about it specifically, but not volunteer such information"[38] in an open-ended questionnaire, the results here suggest that just the opposite may be true. The hypothesized avoidance categories used in this study attempted to discriminate among a number of different reasons for avoiding political media which were clearly distinguishable in the preliminary interviews. However, when the statements were put in questionnaire form, it apparently became impossible for respondents to make those same discriminations reliably.

Since part of this problem in the loss of information

is undoubtedly attributable to the power of factor analysis as a data reduction technique, secondary factor analyses were attempted on only those items which had their primary loadings on Factor I in an attempt to discover the underlying dimensions within the avoidance factor. A number of different factor analytic methods and solutions were attempted, but the results were consistently uninterpretable.[39] While the results here reinforce Becker's finding that "avoidance motivations are quite distinct from positive gratifications,"[40] they provide little clarification about the differing reasons people may have for avoiding political news. The only conclusion which can be tentatively drawn here is that some people do not distinguish clearly among their reasons for avoiding political news, but instead will use any excuse for their lack of interest and subsequent avoidance of political information. This explanation is consistent with Hyman and Sheatsley's[41] notion of the chronic "know-nothings." Coupled with Becker's report of heavy endorsement of avoidance items, the findings here suggest a strong need to begin understanding more clearly the role avoidance orientations play in the acquisition of reliable information to be used in voting decisions by those people who are comparatively uninterested in politics.

Clearly more interested in politics in general and the presidential race in particular were those people who rated high on the conversation and para-social interaction factors. The findings, however, indicate a difficulty in differentiating between conversation for play purposes and for persuasion purposes. These two hypothesized uses are confounded in Factor II. Apart

from their high interest in politics, the regression analysis on the factor suggests that people who talk about politics, for whatever reason, tend to be the younger more committed party members who have developed a decided preference for one of the presidential candidates.[42] Given these relationships, there seems to be a strong relationship between viewing to facilitate conversation and persuasive intent.

In using a more lengthy and hopefully more sophisticated categorical scheme to measure gratifications relevant to political news, it became possible to make some potentially useful distinctions about what kind of surveillance gratifications are most relevant to different types of people attempting to make a vote decision. Becker has noted that while surveillance as a more general information-seeking state and vote guidance as a more specific information-seeking motive linked to a vote decision are conceptually quite different, the results show that surveillance and vote guidance statements are typically empirically intertwined.[43] The results from this study confirm once again that this is the case, but at the same time suggest that the more crucial difference exists not between surveillance and vote guidance, but between different types of vote guidance which have surveillance as their general base.

Both the Para-social Interaction factor and the Surveillance factor define vote guidance functions. By using many items describing a wide range of orientations, it became possible to uncover some of the more latent functions of political media use. If statements defining para-social interaction had not been "buried" within a large instrument it may not have been possible

to get any measure of the importance it plays in vote guidance. When the question is put in a straightforward manner, not many people are likely to admit to interacting with network news' portrayals of the presidential candidates "as if they were on friendly terms with them, or as if they could stand in for a real person."[44] People who rank high on para-social interaction believe that they need the political coverage on network news in order to make a good vote decision and, further, believe by watching this coverage that the presidential candidates are talking directly to them. Since feeling more personally involved with the candidates helps these people make a vote decision, it very likely may be that viewing political news for para-social interaction is simply an instance personality vote guidance which is demonstrative of an affective style of information-seeking about the candidates. The results from the regression analysis suggest that television news is serving an important vote guidance function for a group whose members are comparatively poor, uneducated, and non-readers. Without television news, this group could easily become disconnected from politics. It may be, then, that television is keeping a group of people interested in politics who would not be interested if information were more difficult to come by.

Differing from the Para-social Interaction factor, the vote guidance characterized by the Surveillance factor is based on the reported issue stances of the presidential candidates. Thus, it seems to emphasize the seeking of factual information about candidates' issue stands rather than the seeking of involvement with the candidates, as is the case with the Para-social Interaction

factor. In contrast to Para-Social Interaction, the issue vote guidance indicated in the Surveillance factor suggests a cognitive style of information seeking about the presidential candidates. This notion is reinforced by the finding that those who tend to be strongly attuned to this special type of surveillance orientation also tend to be the more highly educated and politically efficacious people who are typically highly exposed to political news through a variety of media sources. This type of person may very simply be better equipped to think in a comparative way and make sense of the issue stands of the candidates, and thus, be able to incorporate the issue vote guidance from network news programs into a vote decision. Contrasting this with characteristics of Para-Social Interaction seekers, the results from this study suggest that the important distinction to be made is not the one between vote guidance and surveillance but rather the one between cognitive and affective styles of information seeking.

The finding that the viewing of political news was serving a coherent entertainment function for certain types of politically cynical people is not in itself surprising. That high entertainment seeking viewers of political news would find watching the presidential candidates amusing, laughable, and much like watching a comedy program is easily understood given the cynic's point of view on the political process. However, the discovery of this type of entertainment dimension has no precedent in the previous uses and gratifications research. In some part the finding is again due to the expansive nature of the instrument, and gives further credence to the idea that it is indeed

possible to empirically verify some of the more latent functions (or in this case, systemic dysfunctions) associated with political media use. To what degree this finding is peculiar to the 1976 presidential race is not clear. Nonetheless, the functional flexibility that media use offers can be seen in the idea that politically cynical people who are in the cognitively troublesome position of having a relatively strong commitment to a political party while having extreme difficulty supporting their (or any other) party's candidate are likely to see some sardonic humor in the political news on television. Clearly, this orientation demands a bending of media use to these people's needs. Some people are able to perceive humor in what is clearly an unhumorous political situation and at least to some extent are amused by the apparent irony of their predicament.

This bending of media to meet one's own needs is also seen in the Selectivity factor, although in a much more clear cut demonstration of an attempt maintain cognitive consistency. It is not completely clear whether this type of orientation centers around a positive gratification seeking strategy which would tend to reinforce partisan beliefs and candidate leanings or is a selective avoidance strategy aimed at bypassing conflicting information. To some degree, both strategies are operant in the orientation. While some of the statements which best describe the factor are more illustrative of reinforcement rather than avoidance, it can be inferred from the regression analysis that the factor is more suggestive of an avoidance orientation. While the factor score is positively linked to relatively high political activity and high committment to both party and candidate, it is

very clearly predicted by low levels of media news consumption; most noticeably by infrequent television news viewing. It seems that this type of orientation is very likely descriptive of a more clearly defined subset of the avoidance orientation suggested in Factor I. The main difference between the two orientations is that the first Avoidance orientation is descriptive of an avoidance at all costs and is linked to some degree with high political cynicism while the Selectivity orientation demonstrates a more reasoned avoidance of political news by a type of person who is often more politically active, more partisan, and more strongly committed to a particular candidate.

While the results from this study do largely reinforce the idea that the initial Blumler and McQuail conceptualization of political uses and gratifications is indeed still relevant, the findings, at the same time raise serious issues concerning Becker's potentially premature assessment that "the items developed by Blumler and McQuail seem to cover adequately the range of relevant motivations." The preliminary interviews indicated that a very wide range of orientations could, with some patience, be articulated by respondents. Very often these responses went well beyond the more stereotyped responses commonly faulted by critics of uses and gratifications research and allowed for some initial definition of some of the more latent functions associated with political news viewing.

While, as expected, these initial categories often broke down during the factor analysis, their inclusion illuminated some potentially useful latent characteristics of orientations found in the earlier research. Perhaps more importantly, the inclusion

of these items allowed for some clarification of the traditional concept of surveillance and a distinction between personality and issue vote guidance as orientations to political news. Equally important is the finding that para-social interaction is intrinsically related to vote guidance and interest in the campaign. This finding, combined with that which points to comedy entertainment as a viable orientation for political cynics, suggests that some latent, socially awkward, and possibly systemically dysfunctional gratifications can be articulated by respondents, and more importantly, can be empirically understood. If we are to reach the point where we can have some faith in our findings concerning the mediating role gratifications have in media effects, we are going to have a more thorough understanding of just what gratifications are relevant to a certain phenomena. We have just begun to scratch the surface in our detection of gratifications that respondents, for whatever reason, have some reticence or inability to articulate. Clearly, there is still much room for methodological innovation which would allow for a more creative and clear understanding of people's orientations to media.

NOTES

[1]Elihu Katz, Jay G. Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch, "Uses of Mass Communications by the Individual," in Mass Communication Research: Major Issues and Future Directions, eds. W. Phillips Davison and Frederick T. C. Yu (New York: Praeger, 1974), pp. 15-16.

[2]Sidney Kraus and Dennis Davis, The Effects of Mass Communication on Political Behavior (University Park, Pennsylvania University Press, 1976), pp. 183-184.

[3]Jay G. Blumler and Denis McQuail, Television in Politics: Its Uses and Influence (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

[4]Elihu Katz, "The Uses of Becker, Blumler, and Swanson," Communication Research, 6 (January 1979), 79.

[5]Blumler and McQuail, Television in Politics.

[6]Harold D. Lasswell, "The Structure and Function of Communication in Society," in The Communication of Ideas, ed. Lyson Bryson (New York: Harper, 1948), pp. 37-51.

[7]Charles R. Wright, "Functional Analysis and Mass Communication," Public Opinion Quarterly, 24 (Winter 1960), 605-620.

[8]Blumler and McQuail, p. 56.

[9]Ibid., p. 56.

[10]Ibid., p. 66.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Jack M. McLeod and Lee B. Becker, "Testing the Validity of Gratification Measures Through Political Effects Analysis," in The Uses of Mass Communications: Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research, eds. Jay G. Blumler and Elihu Katz (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1974), pp. 137-164.

[13]Ibid., p. 158.

[14]Steven H. Chaffee and Fausto Izcaray, "Mass Communication Functions in a Media-Rich Developing Society," Communication Research, 2 (October 1975), pp. 367-395.

[15]Ibid., pp. 377, 385

[16]David L. Swanson, "Information Utility: An Alternative Perspective in Political Communication," Central States Speech Journal, 27 (Summer 1976), 95-101.

[17]Lee B. Becker, "Measurement of Gratifications," Communication Research, 6 (January 1979), 59.

[18]Ibid., p. 71.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Lester W. Milbrath, Political Participation (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1965).

[21]Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie, Participation in America: Social Equality and Political Democracy (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

[22]Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch, p. 14.

[23]A detailed description of this instrument and a discussion of its development and testing can be found in Lawrence A. Wenner, "Political News on Television: A Uses and Gratifications Study" (unpubl. Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 1977), pp. 57-109. Briefly, the sorting procedure consisted of the author's initial sorting of statements into categories. This was followed by the re-sorting of statements into these categories by trained research assistants. Only those statements which were sorted into the same categories by all three researchers were used in the study. This procedure of using only those statements upon which there was 100 per cent agreement among the coders, in effect, necessarily yielded an inter-coder reliability coefficient of 1.0 for those statements which were included in the study. Two pre-tests of the gratifications instrument suggested some small changes in the statements which ended up in the final instrument and insured that intercorrelations among statements within a category were relatively high and indeed measuring a concept in much the same way the respondents reported thinking about a particular gratification orientation.

[24]Milbrath, pp. 16-29.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Ibid., p. 39.

[27]Ibid., pp. 110-141.

[28]The socio-economic neighborhood variable was used as an indicant of income. It was estimated by the cost of homes in the Cedar Rapids area. This was scaled from lower/lower middle class to middle class to upper middle/upper class.

[29]Angus Campbell, Gerald Gurin, and Warren E. Miller, The Voter Decides (Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson and Co., 1954), pp. 187-189.

[30]Robert E. Agger, Marshall N. Goldstein, and Stanley A. Pearl, "Political Cynicism: Measurement and Meaning," Journal of Politics, 23 (August 1961), 477-506.

[31]Milbrath, pp. 48-89.

[32]The political activity variable was composed by summing the number of the following activities the respondent had actually done: voting, political discussion, attempted to talk another person into voting a certain way, worn a political button or put a campaign sticker on car, made a monetary contribution to party or candidate, attended a political meeting or rally, attended a political caucus, solicited political funds, been a candidate for political office.

[33]Random blocks were chosen from each of the three socio-economic neighborhoods. Eight blocks were sampled from the lower/lower middle class neighborhoods, ten blocks were sampled from the middle class neighborhoods, and four blocks sampled from the upper middle/upper class neighborhoods. Interviewers went clockwise around the block area attempting an interview at each house.

[34]See subprogram FACTOR in SPSS: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, 2nd ed., eds. Norman H. Nie , C. Hadlai Hull, Jean G. Jenkins, Karin Steinbrenner, and Dale H. Bent (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975).

[35]See subprogram REGRESSION in SPSS.

[36]Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl, "Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction," Psychiatry, 19 (Spring 1956), 256.

[37]Becker, pp. 54-73.

[38]Ibid.

[39]This is discussed in greater length by Wenner, pp. 182-187.

[40]Becker, p. 72.

[41]Herbert H. Hyman and Paul B. Sheatsley, "Some Reasons Why Information Campaigns Fail," in The Process and Effects of Mass Communication, eds. Wilbur Schramm and Donald F. Roberts (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1971), pp. 448-466.

[42]While the beta coefficient for strength of leaning to a particular presidential candidate is only .07, the simple correlation between strength of leaning and the conversation factor score was a comparatively strong .23, $p < .01$.

[43]Becker, p. 71.

[44]Denis McQuail, Jay G. Blumler, and J. R. Brown, "The Television Audience: A Revised Perspective," in Sociology of Mass Communications, ed. Denis McQuail (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1972), p. 158.

Table 1.--Varimax rotated factor matrix of use and avoidance items

| Items | Factor Loadings[a] | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | I | II | III | IV | V | VI |
| **Para-social Interaction** | | | | | | |
| When I watch campaign coverage on the network news, I like to think I'm really taking part in the campaign. | -.30 | .22 | .56 | .19 | -.13 | .21 |
| The campaign coverage on the network evening news is important to me because it lets me get involved in the election process. | -.47 | .37 | .40 | .25 | -.12 | -.01 |
| By watching the campaign coverage on the network news, I can feel like the presidential candidates are talking directly to me. | -.21 | .31 | .61 | .08 | -.16 | -.12 |
| **Time Filler** | | | | | | |
| I watch the coverage of the presidential campaign on the network news just because it happens to be on with the rest of the news. | .52 | .13 | -.00 | -.00 | -.14 | -.06 |
| Watching the presidential campaign coverage on the network evening news is nothing special to me, it's like anything else, it just fills time. | .70 | -.16 | -.11 | -.24 | .19 | .19 |
| The presidential candidates aren't very interesting to me, but I watch the campaign coverage on the network news anyway, I don't really know why. | .51 | -.21 | .04 | -.02 | .29 | .19 |
| **Conversation-Play** | | | | | | |
| I use the information I get about the presidential campaign on the network as a starting point in conversation with other people. | -.17 | .73 | .08 | .02 | -.15 | -.06 |
| The coverage of the presidential campaign on the network news is a good thing to talk about with other people. | -.17 | .72 | .17 | .21 | .10 | .07 |
| I enjoy talking to people about what I've seen about the presidential candidates on the network evening news. | -.25 | .72 | .15 | .04 | .04 | .15 |

Table 1.-- continued

| Items | Factor Loadings[a] | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | I | II | III | IV | V | VI |
| **Conversation-Persuasion** | | | | | | |
| Network news programs give me the kind of information I can use in supporting my viewpoints when I talk to other people about the presidential candidates. | .11 | .61 | .10 | .26 | -.22 | -.02 |
| I use the information that I get about the presidential campaign from network news to help me talk about my opinions about the candidates and issues. | -.19 | .72 | .33 | .11 | -.12 | -.11 |
| On network news programs, I watch the candidate I am supporting for President so that I can tell other people more about him. | -.15 | .58 | .41 | .13 | .01 | .19 |
| **General Vote Guidance** | | | | | | |
| Without the quick summaries of the presidential campaign on the network evening news, I don't know how I could make a good decision on how to vote. | -.07 | -.04 | .52 | .18 | -.01 | .12 |
| The campaign coverage on the network evening news is the most important thing I have in making up my mind about how I will vote for President. | -.04 | .08 | .78 | .17 | -.08 | -.16 |
| Presidential campaign coverage on network news programs is hard for me to ignore when I go to vote because they give me so much more information than anywhere else. | -.10 | .21 | .66 | .18 | -.19 | -.18 |
| **Issue Vote Guidance** | | | | | | |
| The campaign coverage on the network news helps me find out which of the presidential candidates has the same views on the issues as I do. | -.15 | .21 | .30 | .44 | -.21 | .11 |
| The campaign coverage on the network evening news lets me see whether or not presidential candidates are consistent on the issues from one day to another. | -.26 | .49 | .01 | .28 | .00 | -.34 |
| Watching the network evening news gives me an opportunity to get a quick look at how the candidates for president stand on certain issues. | -.26 | .30 | .33 | .43 | .05 | .03 |

Table 1.--continued

| Items | Factor Loadings[a] | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | I | II | III | IV | V | VI |
| **Personality Vote Guidance** | | | | | | |
| I watch the campaign coverage on network news to find out about the personalities of the presidential candidates. | -.30 | .29 | .39 | .35 | .04 | .00 |
| When I watch campaign reports on the network news, I am looking for a candidate I can have confidence in as a person. | -.30 | .35 | .28 | .42 | .20 | -.07 |
| Watching the campaign coverage on the network news gives me insights into what kind of people the presidential candidates are. | -.14 | .17 | .25 | .40 | -.08 | .14 |
| **Dramatic Entertainment** | | | | | | |
| I enjoy watching the presidential candidates battle it out on the network evening news. | -.15 | .21 | .30 | .44 | -.21 | .11 |
| I watch the campaign reports on the network news to enjoy the excitement of an election race. | -.23 | .33 | .21 | .37 | .18 | .19 |
| I like to watch the campaign coverage on the network evening news to see all the mudslinging by the presidential candidates. | .14 | .07 | .33 | -.09 | .22 | .18 |
| **Comedy Entertainment** | | | | | | |
| The presidential candidates are really very amusing to watch on the network evening news. | .10 | .06 | -.06 | -.06 | .68 | .31 |
| I get a good laugh watching the presidential campaign on the network evening news. | .42 | -.02 | -.01 | -.05 | .69 | -.09 |
| For me, watching the coverage of the presidential campaign on network news programs is just like watching a comedy program on television. | .51 | -.05 | -.07 | -.24 | .52 | -.21 |

Table 1.--continued

| Items | Factor Loadings[a] | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | I | II | III | IV | V | VI |
| **Reinforcement-Partisanship** | | | | | | |
| I watch campaign reports on network news programs to remind me of my candidate's strong points. | .05 | .32 | .55 | .32 | .08 | .13 |
| Everything I see on the campaign coverage on the network evening news backs up the decision I have already made about who I am going to vote for as President. | .10 | .19 | .11 | .08 | .07 | .58 |
| I watch my candidate for President on the network evening news because I want to be sure I made the right decision. | -.16 | .37 | .45 | .35 | .07 | .15 |
| **Reinforcement-Political Alienation** | | | | | | |
| Since none of the presidential candidates can really be trusted, I don't know why the network news programs spend so much time covering what they have to say. | .56 | -.18 | .00 | -.22 | .45 | .10 |
| It's hard for me to believe any presidential candidate when I see them all making the same promises on the network news programs. | .39 | -.18 | -.27 | -.03 | .47 | .07 |
| Watching the coverage of the presidential campaign on the network evening news just proves to me that it doesn't matter who is elected President. | .51 | -.10 | -.16 | -.07 | .21 | -.13 |
| **Reinforcement-Positive Network News Views** | | | | | | |
| Watching the network evening news is an easy way for me to keep up with the presidential campaign without much effort. | .01 | .29 | .27 | .55 | .00 | -.12 |
| Since the network news programs try to be fair to all the presidential candidates, I feel I can trust their campaign coverage when I watch it. | -.12 | .01 | .16 | .71 | -.11 | .03 |
| I watch the campaign coverage on the network evening news because I know they do a good job. | -.19 | .05 | .30 | .66 | -.00 | -.16 |

Table 1.--continued

| Items | Factor Loadings[a] | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | I | II | III | IV | V | VI |
| **Reinforcement-Negative Network News Views** | | | | | | |
| The campaign coverage on the network evening news is really a waste of time for me because all they show is the candidates smiling and shaking hands. | .41 | -.31 | -.28 | -.23 | .37 | .12 |
| Since network news programs are very biased, I know I can't trust their coverage of the presidential campaign when I watch it. | .11 | -.11 | .06 | -.66 | .36 | .02 |
| When I watch the campaign coverage on the network news, I don't find it very useful because the reporters don't really tell you anything. | .32 | -.26 | .03 | -.36 | .08 | .50 |
| **Avoidance-Partisanship** | | | | | | |
| I avoid watching campaign coverage on the network news because my mind is already made up about who I will vote for in the presidential election. | .62 | -.12 | -.07 | -.04 | .04 | .51 |
| Since nothing I could see on the campaign coverage on the network news would change my mind on how I'm going to vote for President, I don't watch that part of the program. | .65 | -.12 | -.11 | -.00 | .06 | .04 |
| I don't pay attention when the presidential campaign coverage comes on the network news because I already know who I will vote for. | .50 | -.03 | -.05 | -.06 | .06 | .60 |
| **Avoidance-Political Alienation** | | | | | | |
| I don't watch the coverage of the presidential campaign on network news because I've seen too much of it already. | .71 | -.09 | -.15 | -.29 | .08 | .01 |
| I avoid watching the presidential campaign coverage on the network news because I am not much interested in politics. | .69 | -.24 | -.05 | -.07 | .06 | .14 |
| Since the presidential candidates are always trying to say things that please everybody, I don't watch that part of network news programs. | .59 | -.10 | -.08 | -.27 | .02 | .01 |

Table 1.--continued

| Items | Factor Loadings[a] | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | I | II | III | IV | V | VI |
| **Reinforcement-Negative Network News Views** | | | | | | |
| The campaign coverage on the network evening news is really a waste of time for me because all they show is the candidates smiling and shaking hands. | .41 | -.31 | -.28 | -.23 | .37 | .12 |
| Since network news programs are very biased, I know I can't trust their coverage of the presidential campaign when I watch it. | .11 | -.11 | .06 | -.66 | .36 | .02 |
| When I watch the campaign coverage on the network news, I don't find it very useful because the reporters don't really tell you anything. | .32 | -.26 | .03 | -.36 | .08 | .50 |
| **Avoidance-Partisanship** | | | | | | |
| I avoid watching campaign coverage on the network news because my mind is already made up about who I will vote for in the presidential election. | .62 | -.12 | -.07 | -.04 | .04 | .51 |
| Since nothing I could see on the campaign coverage on the network news would change my mind on how I'm going to vote for President, I don't watch that part of the program. | .65 | -.12 | -.11 | -.00 | .06 | .04 |
| I don't pay attention when the presidential campaign coverage comes on the network news because I already know who I will vote for. | .50 | -.03 | -.05 | -.06 | .06 | .60 |
| **Avoidance-Political Alienation** | | | | | | |
| I don't watch the coverage of the presidential campaign on network news because I've seen too much of it already. | .71 | -.09 | -.15 | -.29 | .08 | .01 |
| I avoid watching the presidential campaign coverage on the network news because I am not much interested in politics. | .69 | -.24 | -.05 | -.07 | .06 | .14 |
| Since the presidential candidates are always trying to say things that please everybody, I don't watch that part of network news programs. | .59 | -.10 | -.08 | -.27 | .02 | .01 |

Table 1.--continued

| Items | Factor Loadings[a] | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | I | II | III | IV | V | VI |
| Avoidance-Negative Network News Views | | | | | | |
| I don't watch the campaign coverage on the network news because I know they don't present enough information to make it worth my while. | *.61* | -.10 | -.13 | -.38 | .06 | .19 |
| I don't watch the campaign coverage on the network news because I know they will not show anything that will be helpful to me. | *.55* | -.20 | -.07 | -.23 | .14 | .21 |
| I avoid watching the campaign coverage on the network news because I know they keep repeating the same things over and over. | *.66* | -.11 | -.11 | -.12 | .17 | .38 |
| Avoidance-Relaxation | | | | | | |
| I try to avoid watching the coverage of the presidential campaign on the network news because I prefer watching television programs that will entertain me. | *.74* | -.18 | -.09 | -.00 | .04 | .00 |
| I don't watch the presidential campaign coverage on the network evening news because it doesn't let me get away from my problems. | *.52* | -.03 | -.11 | .05 | .10 | .37 |
| I don't like to watch the coverage of the presidential campaign on the network news because it's no fun. | *.65* | -.18 | -.14 | -.24 | .22 | .10 |
| Percent of Total Variance | 29.6 | 9.5 | 4.0 | 3.3 | 3.2 | 3.0 |

[a]The primary loading for each item is italicized.

Table 2.--Summary of Multiple Regression Analyses

| | Beta Weights for Factors | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | I[a] | II[b] | III[c] | IV[d] | V[e] | VI[f] |
| Degree of Interest | -.43 | .20 | .20 | -.03 | -.07 | -.12 |
| Concern for Outcome | -.14 | .09 | -.05 | .09 | -.03 | .03 |
| Strength of Partisanship | .06 | .10 | ---g | .07 | .16 | .15 |
| Strength of Leaning | .13 | .07 | .01 | -.04 | -.11 | .13 |
| Liberal/Conservative Strength | .01 | .01 | -.07 | -.12 | ---g | -.05 |
| TV Viewing | -.01 | -.02 | .11 | .04 | .03 | .08 |
| TV News Viewing | -.07 | .03 | .07 | .03 | .09 | -.17 |
| Radio News Listening | .05 | -.02 | -.13 | .10 | -.02 | -.14 |
| Newspaper Reading | -.07 | -.07 | -.15 | ---g | -.12 | -.14 |
| Newsmagazine Reading | -.06 | -.17 | -.05 | -.02 | .02 | -.05 |
| Interpersonal Discussion | .06 | .22 | ---g | -.05 | .06 | ---g |
| Education | -.05 | .01 | -.11 | .14 | .03 | -.04 |
| Occupation | .00 | .07 | -.06 | -.07 | .02 | .01 |
| Socio-Economic Neighborhood | -.07 | .06 | -.15 | -.06 | -.10 | -.08 |
| Age | .09 | -.18 | .02 | .16 | ---g | .02 |
| Political Efficacy | .05 | .05 | .05 | .26 | -.05 | .06 |
| Political Cynicism | .12 | -.03 | -.23 | -.11 | .33 | -.04 |
| Political Activity | -.14 | ---g | -.09 | -.07 | .07 | .15 |
| Total Variance Explained ($R^2$) | 40.1% | 25.0% | 28.2% | 19.0% | 15.6% | 14.9% |

[a] $F = 7.47$, df = 18,201, $p < .01$.
[b] $F = 3.96$, df = 17,202, $p < .01$.
[c] $F = 4.97$, df = 16,203, $p < .01$.
[d] $F = 2.97$, df = 16,203, $p < .01$.
[e] $F = 2.35$, df = 16,203, $p < .01$.
[f] $F = 2.09$, df = 17,202, $p < .01$.
[g] Minimum F-level of .01 to enter equation not met; variable deleted from analysis.